

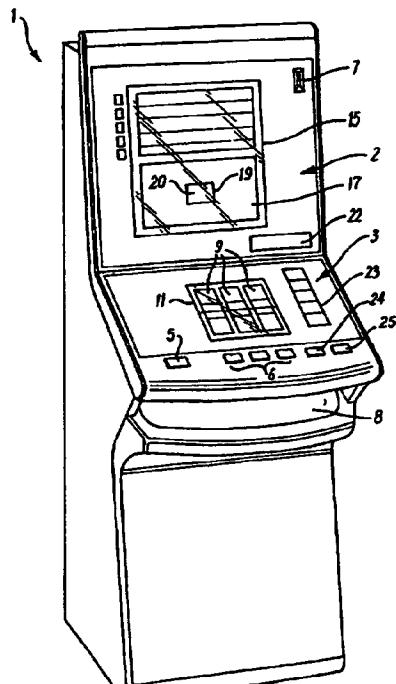
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(71) Applicant(s) IGT-UK Limited (Incorporated in the United Kingdom) Margaret Street, ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE, Lancashire, OL7 0QQ, United Kingdom	(56) Documents Cited GB 2333880 A GB 2327794 A GB 2239547 A WO 99/10849 A1
(72) Inventor(s) Richard Mountney	(58) Field of Search UK CL (Edition R) G4V VAA INT CL ⁷ G07F 17/32 17/34 ONLINE: EPODOC, WPI, JAPIO
(74) Agent and/or Address for Service Wilson Gunn McCaw 41-51 Royal Exchange, Cross Street, MANCHESTER, M2 7BD, United Kingdom	

(54) Abstract Title
Entertainment machine with supplementary play feature

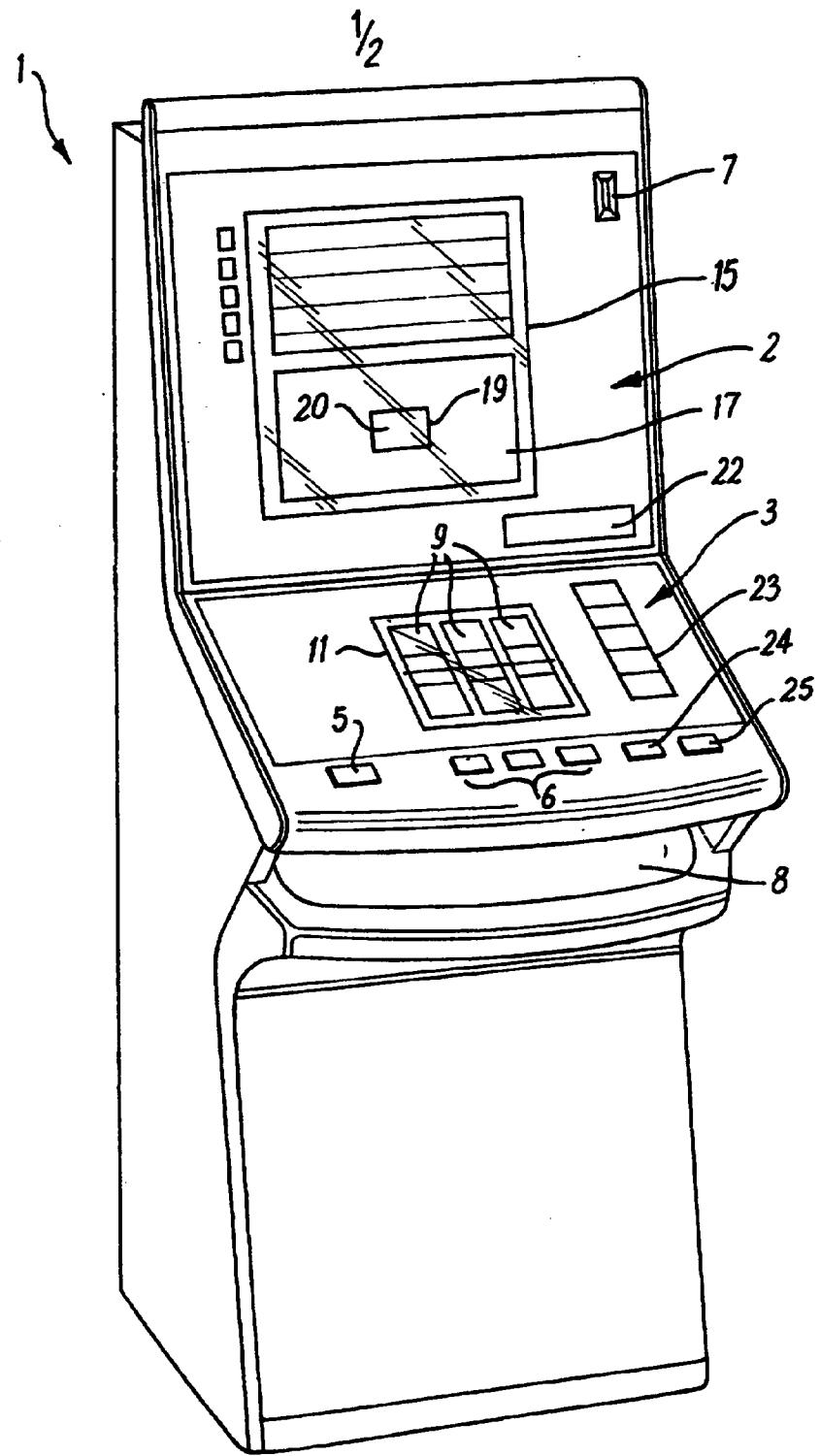
(57) An entertainment machine, particularly a coin-operated amusement with prizes machine of the 'fruit' or 'poker' kind, has a main game, for example involving the rotation of reels (9), and a supplementary play feature, such as a feature game involving a trail (17), or a gamble ladder (23). A player control (25) is provided so that, at the start of a game, by operating the control, the player can opt to transfer directly to the supplementary play feature instead of the main game.



GB 2 349 494 A

At least one drawing originally filed was informal and the print reproduced here is taken from a later filed formal copy.

The claims were filed later than the filing date but within the period prescribed by Rule 25(1) of the Patents Rules 1995.



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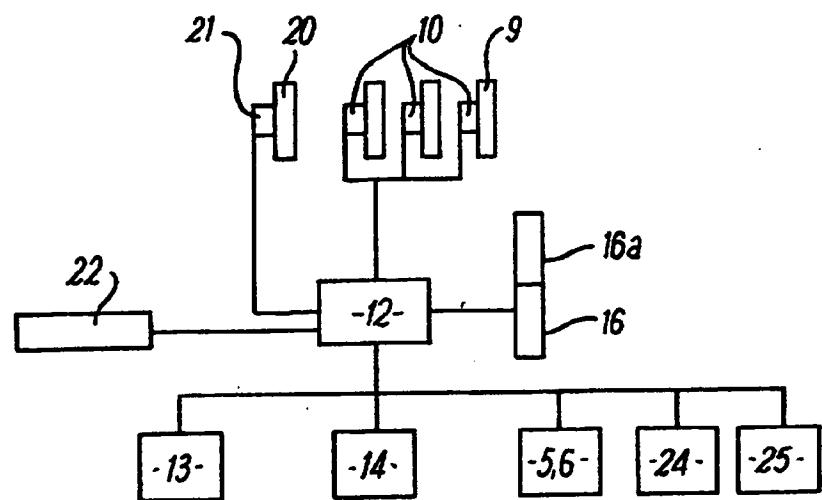


Fig. 2

ENTERTAINMENT MACHINES

This invention relates to player-operable entertainment machines, particularly coin-operated amusement with prizes (AWP) machines, such as "fruit" or "poker" machines, of the kind having a main display device 5 operable in play of a main game for displaying a selected combination of symbols at a win zone. As used herein the term coin is intended also to cover tokens, charge or credit cards or any other means of supplying credit or monetary value.

The main display device of a fruit machine may comprise 10 multiple side-by-side reels which are rotatable about a common horizontal axis within a housing behind a window at the win zone. Each reel has symbols at equally spaced positions around its periphery and the reels can be brought to rest with one symbol on each reel displayed through the window on a win line.

15 If the displayed combination of symbols constitutes a predetermined winning combination an award may be made available to the player.

It is well known to provide a supplementary display or 'feature game' which can be used to enhance the entertainment value of the machine and provide additional or alternative opportunities for winning.

20 In particular, it is known to provide a panel having sections which can be selectively illuminated to represent movement from location to location along a trail, particularly along a wraparound trail, which may simulate the

playing of a board game.

Play is transferred from the main reels to the trail of the feature game on a random or predetermined basis and illumination of the panel sections may then be effected by, or in correspondence with, a rotatable subsidiary feature reel, or otherwise, representing the spin of a reel or roll of a dice or other selection.

Awards or award possibilities may be made available to the player in dependence on the location on the trail to which play has progressed.

Other supplementary play features, which provide the player with a different or supplementary winning opportunity, or the possibility of increasing the value of an attained award, are also well known. In particular it is known to provide a gamble feature whereby for example the player operates a control to arrest movement up and down a 'ladder' as indicated by illumination of successive steps, so that an increased or decreased award is attained depending on the step finally selected.

These known supplementary play features are provided in association with the main game and therefore have a limited involvement in the provision of player entertainment.

An object of the present invention is to provide enhanced possibilities for player entertainment derived from supplementary play features.

According to the invention therefore there is provided an entertainment machine having a main display device for use in playing main

game, and at least one supplementary play feature, characterised by the provision of a player control for selecting operation of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature in place of an available main game.

With this arrangement enhanced opportunities for player 5 entertainment arise in so far as the player can choose to implement a supplementary play feature at the start of a game as an alternative to the usual procedure of playing a main game followed by a supplementary play feature as and when made available.

The player control may be operable on all occasions when a main 10 game is available. Alternatively the control may be operable on only some such occasions as determined on a predictable, random or pseudo random basis.

Most preferably the machine is a coin-operated machine and a predetermined unit of credit value has to be established for play of a main 15 game. There may be the possibility of accumulating such credit units by multiple coin insertions and/or by transfer from credit value awards. Operation of the player control of the present invention may act to decrement such accumulated units, the control being available for operation whenever there is at least one such unit established.

20 The supplementary play feature implemented by the player control may be a feature game, or a gamble feature or any other suitable supplementary feature or combination of features.

Where there are multiple supplementary play features the arrangement may be such that the player control implements one of these as selected on a predetermined basis or on a random or pseudo random basis or at the choice of the player.

5 Where the supplementary play feature operates on a start value, such as the gamble feature which acts to increase or decrease a start value, this value may be equal to the above mentioned game-playing unit of credit value, or it may be calculated on some other basis. Provision may be made for player selection of the start value e.g. by multiple operation of the player control to effect multiple transfer of existing established units of credit value e.g. to the start stake of the gamble feature.

A winning outcome of the supplementary play feature may result in an award to the player in the usual way e.g. by payout or transfer to accumulated credit value which can be used for further game play.

15 Most preferably the entertainment machine is an 'amusement with prizes' (AWP) machine particularly of the fruit machine or poker machine kind using actual (or simulated) rotatable reels as mentioned above.

The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

20 Figure 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of one form of an entertainment machine according to the invention; and
Figure 2 is a block circuit diagram of the machine.

Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 shows a fruit machine having a floor-standing box shaped housing 1 having a front wall which includes upper and lower glass panels 2, 3, a number of operating buttons 5, 6, 24, 25, a coin slot 7 and a payout opening 8.

5 Within the housing 1 there are three axially aligned reels 9 having say 20 symbols at regularly spaced positions around their peripheries. The reels 9 are axially rotatable and are drivably connected to respective stepper motors 10. The reels 9 are arranged behind a window 11 defined by a printed region of the lower glass panel 3. Each reel 9 can be arrested by 10 the respective stepper motor 10 in any of 20 stopping positions in which one symbol is in precise registration with a horizontal win line in the centre of the window 11 and two further symbols are visible above and below the win line.

15 The stepper motors 10 are connected to a microprocessor-based control unit 12. This unit is also connected to a coin-mechanism 13, a payout mechanism 14 and the buttons 5, 6, 24, 25.

20 In use, the player inserts coins into the coin mechanism 13 through the slot 7 sufficient to generate credit for one or more games. The amount of credit is shown on an LED or LCD display 22 and the machine is actuated so that a main game can now be played. The main game commences after a start button 5 has been pressed and the reels 9 spin and then come to rest so as to select a combination of symbols displayed on the win line.

The displayed symbol combination is assessed by the control unit 12 and a win indication is given in the event that the combination is of a predetermined winning nature.

5 The control buttons 6 can be used to perform 'hold' or 'nudge' functions, when made available to the player, so that the player can seek to influence the outcome of a game, in conventional manner.

The upper panel 2 is a transparent glass panel and within this there is a printed display region 15, which can be back-illuminated with a bank of lamps 16, and which provides a conventional supplementary feature game.

10 As shown, this feature game comprises a wraparound trail 17 comprising a series of printed sections marked with decoration, information and symbols.

15 In the centre of the trail there is a printed window behind which an auxiliary feature reel 20 is rotatable. The reel 20 has around its periphery the numbers 1 to 12 corresponding to the values which can be selected with two dice. The reel 20 can be rotated with a stepper motor 21, controlled by the control system 12, and brought to rest with one of the numbers shown through the window 19.

20 Play can progress around the trail 17 by successive back illumination of the sections simulating movement through a number of steps corresponding to the number selected with the feature reel 20.

Play transfers to the trail 17 from the main game in the usual way on

a random or predetermined basis, e.g. when predetermined transfer symbols on the main reels 9 are selected on the win line or otherwise.

5 The player can then operate the start button 5 or another feature button to cause the feature reel 20 to rotate and select a number which causes play to progress along the trail 17 to a selected section at which a symbol on the section is back illuminated.

10 In the event that the main game results in a winning combination of symbols on the win line 11, and/or the feature game results in selection of a winning section or sections of the trail 17, an award may be made available to the player and on a random or pseudo random basis the player may be given an opportunity of gambling the award.

15 As shown there is a gamble ladder 23 having steps corresponding to successively increasing values starting with zero or a low value. The steps are rapidly back illuminated (with lamps 16a) in sequence when the gamble feature is actuated and a gamble button 24 can then be pressed to arrest the sequential illumination on one of the steps. The gambled award is then increased (or decreased) to the value corresponding to the illuminated step.

There is a further button 25 on the front of the machine which can be used as a selector button.

20 Whenever the machine has been provided with sufficient credit, as shown on the digital display 22, the player has the option to operate the selector button 25 as an alternative to starting a main game, as described

above, by pressing the start button 5.

When the selector button 25 is pressed, instead of starting a main game, play transfers directly either to the feature game or to the gamble feature. The arrangement may be such that the machine operating system 5 determines whether it is the feature game or the gamble feature to which play transfers. Alternatively the player may be able to choose e.g. by pressing the button 25 an appropriate number of times, or otherwise, to make a selection.

If play transfers directly to the feature game, the player can then play 10 the feature game in the usual way and possibly obtain an award.

If play transfers directly to the gamble feature, the player can gamble an amount equal to the credit value required to play a main game, or any other appropriate amount, and possibly obtain an increased value of credit.

With the arrangement described above, the player is provided with 15 increased opportunities, and hence enhanced entertainment, since the player has the option of playing a main game followed possibly by the feature game and/or gamble, or of playing the feature game and/or the gamble instead of the main game.

It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to 20 be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only.

CLAIMS

1. An entertainment machine having a main display device for use in playing main game, and at least one supplementary play feature, characterised by the provision of a player control for selecting 5 operation of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature in place of an available main game.
2. A machine according to claim 1 characterised in that the player control is operable on all occasions when a main game is available.
3. A machine according to claim 1 characterised in that the player 10 control is operable on only some occasions when a main game is available.
4. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 3 which is a coin-operated machine wherein a predetermined unit of credit value has to be established for play of a main game and provision is made for 15 accumulation of such credit units characterised in that operation of the player control acts to decrement such accumulated units, the control being available for operation whenever there is at least one such unit established.
5. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 4 characterised in that 20 there are multiple supplementary play features and the player control implements a selected one of these.
6. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the

supplementary play feature operates on a start value characterised in that provision is made for player selection of the start value.

7. A machine according to claim 6 when dependent on claim 4 characterised in that the player selection of the start value is effected by multiple operation of the player control to effect multiple transfer of existing established units of credit value.
8. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 7 which is an amusement with prizes machine of the kind having actual (or simulated) rotatable reels.
- 10 9. A machine according to claim 1 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.



Application No: GB 9904703.7
Claims searched: 1-9

Examiner: Matthew J. Tosh
Date of search: 23 August 2000

Patents Act 1977
Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.R): G4V (VAA)

Int Cl (Ed.7): G07F 17/32, 17/34

Other: ONLINE: WPI, JAPIO, EPODOC

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
A	GB 2333880 A (BARCREST). See whole document.	
X	GB 2327794 A (SHOWCASE PROJECTS LTD.). Note line 20, page 3 to line 3, page 4.	1,2,4,8
X	GB 2239547 A (FAMOUS GAMES LTD.). See lines 5-21, page 2 and line 32, page 2 to line 2, page 3.	1,2,4,8
X,E	WO 99/10849 A1 (ARISTOCRAT LEISURE). Note lines 5-13, page 3.	1,2,4,8

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.